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THE EASTERN ANTHROPOLOGIST

Vol. V, Sep., 1951—August 1952.

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ANCIENT FUNERAL CEREMONIES OF THE LEPCHAS

R. NEBESKY DE WOJKOWITZ

177 The teachings and rites of the Unreformed School of Tibetan Buddhism—nowadays the dominant creed in the Sikkim State—have deeply influenced the beliefs and religious practices of the Lepchas, the main group of aboriginal inhabitants in the Sikkim area. In the course of four centuries, which passed since the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism into Sikkim,[1] the original Lepcha traditions became so closely intermingled with ideas and customs of Tibetan origin,[2] that it is now a most difficult task to separate these two groups from each other; this state is still more complicated by the fact that the Lepchas accepted—even if only in a smaller degree—also some of the traditions and customs of the neighbouring Mangars, Limbus,[3] Nepalese and Bhutanese. Among many other customs also ideas concerning the human soul, death and its causes, life after death, etc., as well as the funeral ceremonies themselves were greatly changed under Tibetan influence. Thus the belief in a judgement of the soul by the Lord of the Dead, *Cho ge pă no*[4] (Tb. *Chhos kyi rgyal po*), the migration of the soul through the perils of the *Bar do*[5] (Tb. *Bar do*)—the stage between death and new life—and its rebirth in one of the "six worlds", the punishment of sinners in hell or *Nyó lyang* (Tb. *dMyal ba*), and other well known theories of Tibetan Buddhism are therefore today [764] widely spread among the Lepchas. Oral tradition, however, preserved accounts of the early Lepcha customs and in some of the remote, scarcely accessible valleys of Sikkim the old funeral rites are said to be still observed.

774 According to the old Lepcha belief,[6] the soul[7] is given to a human being by *Fă gróng thíng* and his wife *Nă zóng nyo*, the ancestors of the 775 Lepcha race,[8] at the moment of birth. *Nă zóng nyo*, who is also responsible for the conception, determines of which sex the child is going to be. The place from which the soul comes and to which it again returns after a man's death, is called *Rŭm lyang*, "the place of gods". It is believed, that this place lies somewhere in the hills, close to Mount Kanchenjunga.[9] The soul, once it has returned to the *Rŭm lyang*, will stay there with the spirits of the ancestors and not reincarnate in this world again. It also will not have to undergo any punishment for the sins, which the deceased might have committed during his lifetime.

At the time of birth, the soul is believed to be very small, but later on it becomes gradually bigger, keeping pace with the growth of the body. The soul of a living being is called *A pil* and it

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changes at the moment of death into a spirit, named *Mŭk nyam*; this change itself is termed *Hyit*. The *A pil* is said to get scared very easily and when frightened can even leave the body; the separation of the soul from the body results however in the instantaneous death of the human being. To protect small children from this danger, mothers often fasten round the neck or armwrist of the child a string with a snail shell on it, "as refuge for the soul".[10]

Illness and death are attributed by the Lepchas to a number of malignant demons who have to be propitiated by various ceremonies, in order to prevent their attacks or to rescue a victim from their influence. Among the host of these evil supernaturals, whose names and spheres of influence vary with the traditions of the different parts of the Lepcha land, there are some who are believed to be especially dangerous as they do not satisfy their greed by harming people through illness, but who try either to eat man's flesh or to destroy his soul. A few of these supernatural beings, as *Sang grong mung*, *Dŭt mung* and his wife *Sŭ mo mung*, etc. who seem to have been at one time widely known and feared among the Lepchas, are believed to have vanished since man started clearing the jungle and to settle even in the remotest parts of Sikkĭm.

Sang grong mung and his wife,—the supernaturals of the Lepchas mostly appear in pairs—are said to have been half men and half apes. Their abode were deep, dark caverns in the hills. They lived on human flesh and to satisfy their hunger they often tried to get people into their power by offering them presents. The person, who had met the *Sang grong mung* or his consort, had no other choice than to accept the gift; however, he had to take it with the back of his hands and not with the palms as customary, otherwise his life was lost.

Dŭt mung and his wife *Sŭ mo mung*—who was always accompanied by her servant *Sŭ mo thor*—had children and they lived in a house, just like men. Their hunting ground was the jungle, where they killed lonely travellers and ate their flesh. *Sŭ mo mung*, who was an ugly ogre with long matted hair and emaciated breasts, is said to have been very fond of seducing young men. To achieve her aim, she could change herself—by brushing her hair back and rubbing her body—into a lovely girl. She induced her victim, to follow her to her house, where she killed and devoured him; but sometimes, if she liked the man, she kept him with her for some time, hiding him from her jealous husband.

Another demon, frequently held responsible for the death of a person, is *Mă zóm mung*, who is said to appear in the form of a huge black dog with ferociously gleaming eyes and a flaming mouth. To

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prevent this evil spirit from returning to a house, where he had just caused a death, the mourners on their way back from the funeral put hedges of thorns across the road, to prevent *Mă zóm mung* from following them. In some localities it is the custom to scare *Mă zóm mung* away by heating during the night after the funeral three huge stones on the hearth. The stones are later brought into the open and somebody of those present calls the name of this demon, asking him to come and eat some meat. The demon, who is believed to be very greedy, comes immediately and tries to swallow the stones, but he burns himself badly and runs away.

Shom mung is a malignant spirit, who causes people to commit suicide or murder. He creeps close to a man from the back and then suddenly enters his mind and taking possession of his victim, forces him ultimately to commit the evil deed. This demon is also held responsible for all accidental death.

A soul, which was captured by *Shom mung*, is unable to proceed to the other world unless it had been freed by a *Mŭn* from the power of the evil spirit. To perform this ceremony, a *Mŭn* has to come in the evening after the funeral to the victim's house. On this occasion, the *Mŭn* is wearing a red dress, with a head-band of the same colour. At the beginning of the ceremony, an animal is killed and its blood collected in a big, flat vessel in order to attract the bloodthirsty spirit. The *Mŭn* then takes her place in front of this vessel and goes into a trance. After some time she suddenly declares that *Shom mung* has entered the container and she throws now into the blood a grass whisk, which she had held ready in her right hand. Leaving the whisk in the vessel —"to keep the demon down"—she grasps a flat stick made from *Nyol kung*[11] wood, which is lying at her right side, and begins to beat frantically the surface of the blood pool, in order to "kill the demon". All those present, shouting and screaming, join her in this beginning, using sticks, stones and knives as weapons. After a while, the *Mŭn* takes the vessel outside the house and pours its contents into a hole, which had been dug previously in the compound, and then all weapons which were used during the ceremony, are also thrown into the pit, which is quickly closed. Only when this ceremony had been performed for somebody, who had fallen victim to *Shom mung*, can his *Mŭk nyam* be guided afterwards in the usual way to the *Rŭm lyang*. It is believed, that unless *Shom mung* is killed, he will become attached to the family which had omitted the rite just described, and he will kill its members one by one.

Another pair of dangerous supernaturals are the demon *Thing mung* and his wife *Nyo mung*, who are able to bring a man's life

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to an end by cutting his "thread of life".

There are however also some spirits, who guard people against the attacks of malignant demons. Among these benevolent supernatural beings, the *A bo a mo să rŭm*, who protect the family and who transfer their protective power from one generation to the other, and *Mŭn kung*, the guardian spirit of life, should be mentioned.

At the moment of death, soul and body, as the Lepchas believe, separate and the soul leaves its temporary abode. At first it lingers in the room for some time, watching the lifeless body. But later, feeling very light as it is not kept down anymore by the heavy human form, it leaves the room and strolls further and further away from the house. It goes now to all the places, which the deceased had visited during his lifetime, and it tries to speak to people it meets on the road, but nobody can hear or see the roaming soul. If no appropriate measures are taken, it might get friendly with the demons and induced by them, can return and start harming people. To prevent this, a *Bong thing* or *Mŭn*[12] have to be called, to say the necessary prayers and invocations. The prayers start with an admonition to the deceased to realize, that his life has now come to an end and that he is not among the living anymore.

When performing this rite or any other funeral ceremony, a *Mŭn* has to be very careful not to touch the corpse and also not to take any food in front of the dead, otherwise she would be afflicted by a severe illness. There are however no such restrictions for the *Bong thing*. If no Lepcha sorcerer is to be found in the neighbourhood, anybody who knows the necessary prayers may be called into the house. Also in case that a *Bong thing* or a *Mŭn* died, this rite has to be performed, only in a more elaborate manner.

Those funeral ceremonies of the Lepchas,[13] which had to be carried out at daytime, were called *Sŭng bam*, while those which took place at night were termed *Sŭng lyon*. The cost of these rites was considerable and thus it occured frequently that people had to sell or pawn some of the family property in order to fulfil their duty towards the dead.

When preparing the corpse for the funeral, all jewellery as earrings and rings had to be removed and then the body was washed with lukewarm water ; to use cold water was not customary, as "during lifetime, one would also not offer cold water for washing". Later the body was smeared with some herbs and dressed in an old, but clean garment. To use a new, unworn dress is a custom, which came into vogue only in more recent times among well-to-do Lepcha families. At last the face of the dead was covered with a white cloth and a coin was placed

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on the forehead to be presented by the spirit to *Fă grong thing*, the male ancestor of the Lepchas. A half seer of rice was measured, wrapped in a piece of cloth and placed at the side of the dead, "to serve as food on the road"; while in common life always a heaped measure is taken, in this case the measure is linear. 764

The corpse was taken out of the house by an opening, which had been made either in a wall or in the floor, as the dead was not supposed to leave his former residence by the door. After the corpse had been brought into the open, it was placed on a bamboo stetcher or—according to Tibetan custom—its legs were bent, the knees drawn towards the chin and then fastened in this position with a band. In the latter case, the body was ultimately placed into an old basket and then carried on the back by anybody strong enough, to the cemetery. The top of the basket was usually covered with a piece of nice, embroidered cloth, which however was not burried along with the dead.

Today, in consequence of Tibetan influence, the dead are burnt on pyres and the ashes immerged in a river. The Sikkimese lamas, who introduced this custom, claim that by burning a dead one certainly avoids his soul becoming the victim of a malignant spirit and thus the old rites of freeing a soul from the power of a demon or the recalling of the *Mŭk nyam*, which were formerly performed by a *Mŭn*, became unnecessary. Nowadays, the majority of the Lepcha people burn their dead and only in a few very remote places some of the old funeral customs, like the recalling of the *Mŭk nyam*, are still practised. Mostly however, lamas are called today into the house to conduct the necessary ceremonies and to guide the soul on the way to the other world, as prescribed by the Buddhist religion; very frequently however also a *Bong thing* or *Mŭn* are fetched to say simultaneously some prayers according to Lepcha tradition. 764 177

In former times, very elaborate funeral ceremonies were performed and it was customary, to bury the dead in graves. Some details of these ceremonies as well as the form of the grave varied with the different clans and localities. 764

It seems, that at least three different types of grave were developed by the various Lepcha clans:[14]

(a) The *cŏk*, a pit-grave with a circular base; the dead was placed in this grave either in a reclining or erect position, his face turned towards Mt. Kanchenjunga.

(b) A pit-grave called *cŏk den*,—with a square base—into which the corpse was put in erect position and facing Kanchenjunga.

(c) An oblong grave, the *cŏk bli*, in which the dead was buried in a reclining position, turned in the same manner as before.

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764 On top of each grave a small hillock was made, with a tombstone (*cók bum*) in the middle; the grave thus marked was called *cók de*. The inside of the pit was carefully laid out with stones, so that the earth would not touch the corpse. The reason, why the dead were always turned towards Mt. Kanchenjunga was that they "should see the mountain, from which the Lepchas originated."

According to the custom of various localities, people were either buried in single graves, which were made in the fields, the jungle or—more frequently—close to a river, or on cemeteries, called *cók bróng lyang* or *cók bram lyang*. While the single graves were mostly destroyed in the course of time, the site of the ancient cemeteries is still [766] often remembered.—Children below the age of ten were buried without the full ceremonial. Women, who died together with their child in childbirth, were buried jointly in one tomb.

When the funeral procession reached the freshly dug grave, the corpse was lowered into the pit and then, according to local custom, various things were laid near the dead. Besides the half seer of rice and the coin for *Fă gróng thing*, a bow and arrow were placed at the side of a man, or sometimes his knife (*ban*), the indispensable instrument of every Lepcha man. To a girl, her comb, and to a woman her sickle were given. Then a rope made of bamboo tissue and consisting of two parts, linked together with a loose sling, was lowered by a *Bong thing, Mŭn*, or a close relative into the grave. Shortly before the pit was closed, the person who held the rope called the deceased by his name, telling him that his "life spirit" is now being removed and that he should keep away from the living and not try to harm them; then he pulled hard on the rope, so that the sling opened and the lower half of the rope fell into the pit.

In order to close the grave, at first some stones were arranged in a kind of roof also above the basket, so that the corpse was surrounded now from all sides by a stone wall. Then earth was pilled up, to form a small hillock and above the head of the dead, the tombstone was set. When heaping up this hillock, great care was taken to make its surface as smooth as possible, because three days after the funeral the relatives [787] had to return to the grave, to see whether there were any traces on the hillock. If imprints of human feet were seen, it was regarded as a sign that the spirit of the dead had walked around the grave, but if traces of any animal were found, it was believed that they were left by the demon, who had caused the man's illness and death.—Then a grass whisk was taken and a magic circle was drawn with it around the tomb, to prevent any other soul from entering it. In some localities, if a man was buried, a "wild boars nest" —a small shelter in form of a nest, as made

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by wild boars during the rainy season—was erected with the help of some twigs and dry leaves, the idea probably being, that this nest should provide a temporary shelter for the *Mŭk nyam* who according to the belief of some Lepcha clans, stays for seven days on the burial ground. When a woman died, a small hand-loom was sometimes placed near the tomb. 764

After closing the grave, an egg was broken on the tombstone and some rice as well as a bamboo container filled with Lepcha beer (*ci*) were placed on the hillock as a food-offering for the dead. Then all tools which were used for digging the pit were beaten against each other for a while and at last all the wooden handles of these instruments were removed and piled up near the grave, while only the iron parts were kept to be used again.

When returning from the funeral, the mourners had to put up obstacles—as already mentioned before—to hinder the demon *Mă zóm mung* from following them. When reaching the house, everybody who had attended the funeral had to undergo a ritual purification. To this purpose an ox was killed and some of its blood was poured into a vessel and strained with water; the right foreleg of the sacrificed animal was laid aside, to be used in the ceremony which commenced after darkness had fallen, while the rest was prepared as food for the guests. Then a *Bong thing* or *Mŭn* entered the house, in which the death had occurred and performed its cleansing, going into every room and sprinkling in all corners some of the ox blood, with the help of a whisk made of nine different kinds of grass. Then all foodstuff which had lain close to the dead, had to be removed and at last everybody before entering the house had to be purified by waving the grass whisk over his head; this action was known as *Phĭk* or *A phĭk*. 764 763

During the night the ceremony of "recalling the *Mŭk nyam*" had to be performed and in some of the more outlying localities this rite is sometimes still practised. Only a *Mŭn* can perform this rite. In former times, before starting her invocations, the *Mŭn* had to walk in the evening to the grave and beat several times with a stick against the tombstone. Returning to the house, she took her seat with the back to a wall and facing the door; it was regarded as auspicious, if she could face in this position Mt. Kanchenjunga. 764

Then the right foreleg of the ox, which had been prepared previously, was placed in a basket and brought into the room. Only the upper part of the leg was used, while the part from the knee downward was cut away. The basket was set near the *Mŭn* and a rope wound around the joint of the leg, while the other end was fastened with a

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764 loose sling to the little finger of the *Mŭn's* left hand. In her right hand she took a knife, as weapon against evil spirits.

764 After these preparations had been finished, the *Mŭn* works herself gradually into a slight trance, and with a high, loud voice she begins 775 her incantations. She calls upon the *Mŭk nyam* to recognize, that he belongs from now on to the world of the dead, and that he should not hide in trees, stones, rivers, lakes or fire, but he should join the soul of the *Mŭn* for a tour of the Lepcha land. The *Mŭn* sings now for hours a long, rhymed account, the text of which she had learned by heart from her teacher during the time of initiation. She describes to the spirit the beauty of Sikkim, its snow mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes, the forests, fields and lonely dwellings of men. At last, the *Mŭn* guides the spirit down the Teesta River and describing the source of this greatest river of Sikkim, she conducts the *Mŭk nyam* across the Indian plains, "to show it the ocean". But she admonishes the deceased, that he should not gaze too long at the endless sea, as he has to return with her that very night to the Lepcha land. Then again the *Mŭk nyam* is led to the Teesta and following the river upstream, the *Mŭn* guides the spirit back to the house, from which they started the journey.[18]

764 In the early morning, when the darkness of the night begins to fade into the grey of the approaching day, the ceremony reaches its 775 climax. At this time all the relatives of the deceased, who are present 787 in the house, assemble in front of the *Mŭn*. The dresses, jewellery and other personal belongings of the dead person, as well as numerous dishes with various foods are placed near the *Mŭn*, who finishes now her incantations and falls into a full trance. Her eyes close, the face becomes ash-gray and mask-like. Suddenly, tears begin to flow from her eyes and the whole body begins to tremble. This is supposed to be the moment at which the spirit of the deceased enters the body of the *Mŭn*, and using the sorceress as a medium, the *Mŭk nyam* begins to speak through her mouth. He tells now to his relatives the cause of his death and expresses his last wishes, while members of the family in their turn frequently ask the deceased, whether he left perhaps any business unsettled in his lifetime, where some of his possessions, which could not be found are hidden, etc. Many of the older Lepchas who witnessed several times the recalling of the *Mŭk nyam*, unanimously state that frequently most surprising occurrences take place during this ceremony. It often happens that somebody dies without having disclosed, where he had hidden his money or jewels, and the relatives were searching in vain for these things. If however this question is put to the *Mŭn* in his trance, she usually answers it without hesitation

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and then somebody of those present leaves the room immediately to search at the spot now indicated; he mostly returns within a short time with the missing objects.

While the family property is being inherited according to the old Lepcha law, the personal belongings of the dead are distributed among his closer relatives. This is usually carried out by the *Mŭn*, while still possessed by the *Mŭk nyam*. But not always is this way of dividing the heritage regarded as just, and it frequently leads to quarrels.

At the end of this ceremony, a food offering is made to the dead. A cup with some water is handed to the *Mŭn*,—who still remains in the trance —and she sprinkles some of the water on all the food which had been placed in front of her, thus making it "eatable for the deceased". Then all the members of the family step forward one by one and present a dish with food to the spirit and burn also some incense, together with traces of food, and a container filled with Lepcha beer is given to the *Mŭn* to drink. Shortly after this offering the *Mŭk nyam* leaves the body of the *Mŭn*, who soon returns to full consciousness, and then removes the rope from her left hand. Some of the Lepchas claim, that when the *Mŭn* begins to complain of pain—usually in a part of her body, corresponding to those limbs and organs of the deceased, which had been affected by the deadly illness or accident —it has to be regarded as a reliable sign, that the *Mŭk nyam* is about to leave the medium.

After a short interval, the *Mŭn* ties again the rope to her left hand and goes into a light trance, in order to guide the spirit of the dead to the other world. On the way to the *Rŭm lyang*, an obstacle called *Lep*, which is imagined to be like a tremendous waterfall or a deep precipice, has to be crossed by the *Mŭk nyam* with the assistance of the *Mŭn*. Having overcome this barrier, the spirit is met by *The kung tek*,[16] the first *Bong thing*, and his wife *Ne kung ngal*, the first *Mŭn*. They will enumerate to the deceased the line of his ancestors, mentioning on the seventh place the name of the mountain, with which his clan believes itself to be connected,[17] and then they accompany the spirit, to meet *Fă grŏng thing* and *Nă zŏng nyo*, the ancestors of the Lepchas. In the *Rŭm lyang* the spirits of all, who had died in more recent times, dwell in the form of shadows, while those who died soon after the world had been created, reside here in their bodily form, ready to return to the world should its inhabitants die out.

There are different accounts to be found among the various clans of the Lepchas regarding the way in which the *Mŭk nyam* is supposed to reach the *Rŭm lyang*. The Chronicles of the Maharajas of Sikkim mention a belief of the Sengdenmos, that the spirit goes to

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the "Place of Gods" via a subterranean passage, the entrance of which is a cave in the vicinity of Monphu, while the Heemos claim, that the spirit enters this way near a rock called Sing Dang, in the vicinity of the village Samdong. A different cave is said to be the entrance for the dead of the Lingsomo clan. This cave is called Dret gang and it lies near the hamlet of Rabdentsi. A legend current among the Namphagmo Lepchas claims that the dead of this clan do not go to Mt Kanchenjunga, but to the Mennam mountain, which is specially sacred to this clan. They reach the mountain through a subterranean passage the entrance of which is the Phim Leb cave near Lingmo.

The funeral ceremonies end on the seventh day after the burial. At first, on the third day some rice, *ci*, and eggs were brought to the grave and after five more days had passed, a hen is sacrificed and then some prayers are said by a *Bong thing* or *Mŭn* in order to chase away all malignant spirits and to cleanse the house from all evil once more.

There was no difference between the burial ceremonies of the *Bar fong mo*, the Lepcha aristocracy, and the *A den* or common people, and the dead of both groups were treated alike. Only the funeral rites for a *Mŭn* or *Bong thing* were performed in a different way. Even today, a *Bong thing* or *Mŭn* is not cremated, but mostly buried according to the old custom. In his house, the dead person is dressed into the full garment of a Lepcha sorcerer and his face is covered, as customary, with a white cloth and also the coin for *Fă grŏng thing* is placed on his forehead. Around the body, all his magical instruments and drugs are spread out, the latter being kept in flat, closed baskets. Furthermore, a small ladder—"to reach with its help the *Rŭm lyang*"—dried fish and birds, the beak or at least some other part of a crane, the beak of a hornbill and numerous baskets containing various foodstuffs are laid all around the corpse. The body is later placed on a bamboo stretcher, together with all objects enumerated above and carried out by the door,—and not by an opening in the wall or floor, as done at the funeral of a common man. Then the body is carried to the grave and placed in the pit in a sitting position. On the left and right sides of the dead two magical sticks (*ceng pă ting*),[18] as used by the sorcerer during his lifetime, are placed and then also all the various paraphernalia, which had been brought on the stretcher, is laid in the grave.

The rites which follow are just like those performed at the funeral of common people. After the ceremony of calling back the *Mŭk nyam* has been carried out, also the spirit of a deceased *Mŭn* or *Bong thing* is conducted to the *Rŭm lyang*, to join the spirits of his ancestors.

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1. The first and main propagator of Buddhism in Sikkim was Lama *Lha btsun nam mkha 'jigs med* (shortly called *Lha btsun chhen po*) who belonged to the Tibetan *rDzogs chhen pa* Sect. He was later joined by a number of other learned priests, among whom the *rNying ma pa* Lama *Kha thog kun tu bzang po* and Lama *mNga bdag sems pa phun tshogs rig hdzin* were the two most outstanding personalities. It seems that the work of spreading Buddhism in Sikkim was begun in 1642, in which year also the coronation of the first Maharaja of Sikkim, *Phun tshogs rnam rgyal* is said to have taken place. After *Lha btsun chhen po's* death his first reincarnation, called *Mi bskyod dga bo*, was found at *hBum thang in Bhutan*.

2. The influx of Tibetan settlers began with the advent of *Gyad hbum bsags* the ancestor of the present ruling family of the Sikkim State, who reached this area via the Chumbi Valley (Tb. *Gro mo*) towards the end of the 16th century. *Gyad hbum bsags* was accompanied by a number of Tibetan retainers, who settled in Sikkim—which they called *hBras ljongs* the "Rice Country"—and who became kown as "Bhutias". They were the ancestors of the eight clans, into which the local Tibetan population became later divided. In the following centuries, also other groups of settlers arrived in Sikkim, partly from the Bhutanese districts of Ha and Pharo, and some even from Assam. In connection with the account of the first encounter between the Tibetans and the aboriginal inhabitants, the Chronicles of the Maharaja of Sikkim mention an interesting episode: "as the (Tibetan) party happened to be riding on ponies, and some of the retainers had matchlock guns, which they went on firing along the road, the simple natives who had never seen ponies nor firearms, said to others, that the entire party rode on huge hogs, and some of them bore sticks, which produced great sounds."

3. The Limbus, who call themselves Yakthumba, are mentioned in the Tibetan Chronicles of the Maharaja of Sikkim, together with the Mangar tribe, under the collective name *Tshong*; the name 'Limbu' under which they are mostly known, is of Nepali origin. According to a doubtful oral tradition, they are supposed to have migrated into Sikkim from the neighbouring Tibetan province of *Tshang*. The Limbus, who were divided into ten clans, were living peacefully side by side with the Lepchas, who regarded them as distant relatives and even claimed, that the Lepcha and Limbu gods were related to each other.—The Chronicles mention, that Limbus sometimes occupied important positions in the administration of the Sikkim State, and a Limbu lady became one of the wives of the second Maharaja. At the beginning of the 18th century, under the rule of the fourth Maharaja, the majority of the Limbus left Sikkim in consequence of the heavy labour, which was being imposed on them, especially at times of the frequent raids of the neighbouring Nepalese and Bhutanese.

4. All Lepcha words, the orthography of which it was possible to ascertain, are printed in italics according to a simplified romanization, similar to the system of transcription adopted in the Dictionary of the Lepcha Languages, by G. B. Mainwaring and A. Gruenwedel, Berlin 1898. Also all Tibetan words are rendered in an orthographic romanization.

5. About the Bardo and the beliefs connected with it see Evans-Wentz, W.Y: The Tibetan Book of the Dead, London 1927, and Tucci, G.: Il libro tibetano dei morti, Milano 1949.

6. To all those among the Lepchas who supplied me with valuable informations concerning the subject here dealt with, especially to Mrs. D. Mohan of Kalimpong, Mr. K. P. Tamsang, the Mandal of Bong Basti and to one of the oldest living Lepchas, the 105 years old "Mamiboy Badschi" of Nyim, my sincere thanks are due; I would also like to acknowledge gratefully the valuable assistance, rendered to me by Miss Ray Williams of Kalimpong and Father J. M. Brahier of the Catholic Mission at Gik.

7. I was unable to obtain a confirmation of the statement made by Kali Kumar Das in his The Lepcha people and their notions of heaven and hell, JBTS, Vol. VI, Pt. 1, Calcutta 1896, p. 4, that the Lepchas believe in the presence of eight different souls in the human body.

8. They are supposed to have been created from the ice of the Kanchenjunga glaciers by the foremost god of the Lepchas *Ta she thing* (or *Tuk bo thing* ?).—It is today, with traditions quickly vanishing, rather difficult to establish the name of this God Creator. Due to the adoption of the name *Ta she* for Padmasambhava (Tb. *Padma hbyung gnas*) the main and widely venerated saint of the Unreformed Buddhist School of Tibet and the resulting

[1 [i.e., human souls, see cat. 116, p. 27. – Analyst]]

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confusion of legends concerning Padmasambhava and the God Creator of the Lepchas, the traditions are today rather vague. According to some previous publications (e.g. Mainwaring, G.B. : A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) language, Calcutta 1878, p. XI) the name of the God Creator was *Ta she thing*. I heard however very frequently also the statement that the name of this chief god was *Tuk bo thing*, who was followed several thousand years later by another supernatural being called *Ta she thing*.

9. This most prominent mountain of Sikkim occupies a very important place in the ancient traditions of the Lepchas as well as in the religious life all Sikkimese Buddhists. For accounts of Lepcha ceremonies in honour of Mount Kanchenjunga see Gorer, G. Himalayan Village, London 1938, pp. 201—203; Morris, J.: Living with Lepchas, London 1938, pp. 274—276; R. Nebesky de Wojkowitz and G. Gorer: The use of thread-crosses in Lepcha lamaist ceremonies, The Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. IV., No. 2, Lucknow 1951, pp. 70—73. Some notes, concerning the mountain god of Kanchenjunga (Tb. *Gangs chhen mDzod lnga*, "The five glacier treasuries") as venerated by the Buddhists of Sikkim, are to be found in Ribbach, S. H.: Vier Bilder des Padmasambhava und seiner Gefolgschaft, Hamburg 1917, and Hoffmann, H.: Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Boen Religion, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Mainz 1950.

10. Compare Gorer, Himalayan Village, p. 192

11. Compare Dictionary of the Lepcha Language, p. 114b.

12. The *Bong thing* and *Mun* are the main sorcerers of the Lepchas. A *Bong thing* is always male, a *Mun* mostly female, sometimes also male. The position of *Mun* and *Bong thing* is inherited within the family, one of its members being chosen for this task by the supernaturals, who protect and at times also possess him. With the help of their guardian deities the *Bong thing* and *Mun* are able to avert and counteract the influence of malignant spirits, cure illness, etc. It is also their task to perform the numerous ceremonies, devoted to the worship of benevolent deities and to the appeasement of demons, as well as to carry out all rites connected with the more important events of Lepcha life. They are believed to be in possession of strong supernatural powers, which at times were also used to harm people. Thus the Chronicles of the Maharajas mention, that at the beginning of the 18th century several Lepcha sorcerers tried to kill by black magic the reigning fourth Maharaja, *Phyag rdor rnam rgyal*. Also to his successor *Chhos rgyal ngyur med rnam rgyal*, who had ascended the throne in 1717, some Lepcha magicians tried to show their skill: they made a knot into the water of a fountain and suspended a stone from the sky, they draw figures on the surface of water, spun sand into a rope and at last they made the roofs of the Maharajas palace and a neighbouring temple meet. While the ruler with his retinue were very impressed by these miracles, some lamas who had also come to witness this spectacle, were not affected by the powers displayed and they subsequently killed the magicians, claiming that they were imposters.

Another group of Lepcha sorcerers are men called *Pa mo* (Tb. *dPa bo*) and their female counterparts, who bear the name *Nyen jo mo* (Tb. *rNal hbyor ma*). They are said to become possessed by Tibetan deities, who cause them to speak Tibetan in the trance and who advice them in matters of divination. The *Pa mo* and *Nyen jo mo* dress in Tibetan garments and they use Tibetan lama bell (*Dril bu*) and a small, two-faced drum (*rNga chhung*) as their main instruments. They preserved many traditions of the ancient, pre-Buddhist Boen faith of Tibet and their performances have therefore nothing to do with the ceremonies of the Sikkimese lamas, of whom they are entirely independent.

A third group of Lepcha sorcerers, also of minor importance, are the *Ya bo* and *Ya ma*, who are male and female respectively. They are supposed to become possessed by Limbu spirits and they therefore bear these two names. under which the Limbu sorcerers are known. Their main instruments are metal gongs and divination balls, called Yak. Certain similarities between religious practices of the Lepcha sorcerers and some ancient Tibetan customs are the reason for frequently occuring statements in books on Tibet, that the old Lepcha faith is identical with the Boen religion of that country. A comparative study of both beliefs shows however, that the Lepcha faith is certainly not identical with that form of the Boen religion, which it assumed after the commencement of its struggle with Buddhism. It seems rather that it corresponds in many points to the old shamanistic stratum of Central Asia, out of which in Tibet the Boen developed to a religion.

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12. About Lepcha funeral ceremonies, especially those performed according to Buddhist rites see Gorer, Himalayan village, pp. 345—362. 600

14. The Chronicles of the Maharajas of Sikkim mention a number of different Lepcha clans. Among these the clans called Sengdungmo, Lingsom-mo, Heemo, Karthakmo and the descendants of the Thekong Salung family were of principal importance; other clans are Tugnyeemo (living near Chumthang), Sampa-putso-mo (Namtehn and Tsidam), Targokmo (Rin chenpong), Barmekmo (Barmiok), Namteeemo (Namtai), Mangmungmo (Dentam), Taglongmo (Dallam), Samtrukmo (Samdong), Namphagmo (Namphok) Ratoomo (Rinchenpong), Kabeemo (Tumlong), Phogram-mo and Rungnyogram-mo (Lingthem), Rinyet-rambo (near the source of the Rangeet river), Rathongram-mo (near the source of the Radong river), Ringbit rambho (near the source of the Radong river), Lasogmo (Tashiding and Lasog), Kaleg ram-mo (source of the Kaleg river), Rinagmo (Mangbro), Yogcham-mo (Phensang), Rimpongmo (Rumtek), Nebemo (Dikchu), etc. 618

The Lepcha communities, residing in Ilam (Nepal) were called Rangangmo, Phengbo, Namchamo, Gholingmo, Samdurmo, Kotramo, Sungfungmo, Samlingmo, Lingdam-mo, etc.—The Ilam group of the Lepcha people seems to be of fairly recent origin. According to the historical material available, some 800 Lepcha households, who had taken part in an insurrection against the reigning 7th Maharaja, left Sikkim in 1826 under the leadership of their headmen Dathno, Jerong Denon and the Kazi Gorok, and settled with the assistance of the Nepalese in the province of Ilam.

Two other names should be mentioned here: the *Na ong*, who lived near Dallam in Sikkim, but later died out, and a group of Limbus called Sanyit bho, who were classified as a Lepcha clan. A note on the *Na ong* see also in Kali Kumar Das, The Lepcha People, p. 5.

15. The Ilam Lepchas have a particular custom of keeping those assembled in the house awake during the long vigil[1]. While the *Mun* chants her account, one man—usually somebody who is known as a witty story teller—takes his place in another corner of the house and tries to keep all present awake by telling them jokes and stories. 764 184

16. *The kung tek* and *Ne kung ngal* are said to have been the children of the Lepcha ancestors, *Fa grong thing* and *Na zong nyo*. This first pair of sorcerers is today surrounded by numerous legends, current among the Lepchas. One of these legends tells about their encounter with *Gyad kbum bsags*, the ancestor of the Sikkim Maharajas, who came to obtain their blessing so that sons might be born to him. About the way in which he and his retinue were received by *The kung tek* and his wife, the Chronicles say: "Entering his house they discovered the old man on a raised throne of bamboo. He had washed off the dust and ashes, which had covered his face during his work of clearing the jungle. He had put on his feather cap and the garland of teeth and claws of wild animals, interspersed with various shells and cowries. He sat with a dignified mien, while his wife *Ne kung ngal* was busily engaged in getting food and drink ready. When the strangers entered, a wide bamboo mat was spread on the ground...." *Gyad kbum bsags* received the blessings and returned to his residence in the Chumbi Valley, where in the following years three sons were born to him. Later he went back to Sikkim to offer his thanks to *The kung tek* and to conclude a pact of friendship with him: "This friendship was cemented by a ceremony, at which several animals, both domestic and wild, were sacrificed and all the local deities invoked to bear witness to this solemn contract of friendship, binding the Lepchas and Tibetans in an inseparable bond. They sat together on the raw hides of animals, entwined the entrails around their bodies, and put their feet together in a vessel filled with blood, thus swearing the blood oath to each other."—This event is also shortly mentioned in Risley, H. H., History of Sikkim, JBTS, Vol. IV., Calcutta 1896.
It is possible, that *The kung tek* was a person which once actually lived and which only later became enveloped in legends, as the Chronicles mention—besides a number of descendants, of whom only the names are given—also a certain Lepcha headman, called Tsen Aphong, who was a direct descendant of *The kung tek* and who served under the second Maharaja, *beTsun bsrung rnam rgyal* (ascended the throne in 1670). 791

17. While the Lepchas in general derive their origin from Mt. Kanchenjunga and its immediate environs, the various clans later on established legendary relations to various mountains, 773

[1 [i.e.] during the funeral rites. —Analyst]

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773 in whose neighbourhood they had settled, two or three clans often worshipping the same mountain. It became customary, that each clan had to perform an annual sacrifice to the spirit of its particular mountain. In regard to marriage, there is no obstacle—unless a blood relationship exists or that people belong actually to the same clan—that members 582 of two clans, which venerate the same peak, should not intermarry. In case that bride and bridegroom belong to clans, which worship two different mountains, the wife will have to sacrifice after the marriage to the sacred peak of her husbands clan.

18. They are made from a certain kind of reed; on the top of the stick cuts are made in 791 such a way, that these parts open in the form of a flower. These sticks are regarded as the symbol of the magical power, over which the sorcerer commands.

1 [See cat. 116, p. 36. - Analyst]